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Saturday, February 19, 2005

Late to the 'middle ground'

Sen. James Inhofe wants to spend some "quality time" with his Democratic colleagues to seek a "middle ground" on President Bush's effort to rewrite the principal federal clean air law.

Since when?

The Oklahoma Republican is a right-wing saber-rattler who views global warming as a groundless scare story, has scored a zero with the League of Conservation Voters since 1997, was the only senator to oppose restoration of the Florida Everglades and has compared the Environmental Protection Agency to the Gestapo.

But now he has a problem.

He can't get the President's efforts to amend the 1970 Clean Air Act out of his own committee. All eight Democratic senators oppose the changes, and they have been joined by Republican Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island. That means a vote on a motion to send the bill to the full Senate would be killed by a 9-9 stalemate that would embarrass Mr. Bush.

To the Republicans who now run Washington, phrases like "middle ground" and "bipartisanship" normally don't mean compromise and respect for opposing views. They mean browbeating Democrats in an effort to pick up a few votes for the GOP's inflexible agenda.

The Democrats shouldn't play along. The Republicans have the votes to do what they want. If their designs repel even some of their own members, it's not up to the Democrats to ride to the rescue.

And as for the President's "Clear Skies Initiative," he says it will reduce harmful emissions by letting smokestack industries trade pollution credits among themselves within federal caps. Environmentalists generally argue that it will let the worst polluters keep on fouling the air.

Who's right?



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Well, bear in mind that if the bill would really clean the air and bring polluting industries to heel, Sen. Inhofe wouldn't be for it.

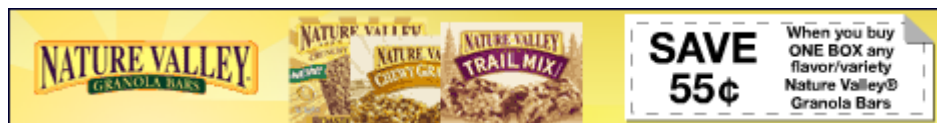
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